



Australian Bureau of Statistics

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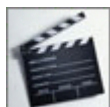
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labour statistics news

- Employed persons 10.7m (Jan 09) • Unemployment rate 4.6% (Jan 09)
- Participation rate 65.0% (Jan 09) • Underutilisation rate 10.6% (Nov 08)
- Average weekly earnings \$898 (Aug 08) • Wage price index 119.9 (Sept 08)

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INQUIRIES

For further information about this publication, contact Labour Market National Statistical Centre on Canberra (02) 6252 7206

About this Release

Labour Statistics News is published twice yearly by the Labour Market Statistics National Statistical Centre (NSC). It provides information about the latest in labour market statistics including: outlining recent developments and survey reviews; informing and seeking feedback on current projects; providing analysis and articles on labour-related issues; providing information on how to find, use and interpret ABS labour market statistics; providing useful contacts within the labour market area of the ABS; highlighting significant releases of ABS labour market data or analysis; and advertising upcoming statistical training in labour market statistics. Labour Statistics News aims to reach a wide range of users to inform and engage with the community on labour market issues and statistical developments.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the first issue of Labour Statistics News

Labour Statistics News is your opportunity to keep up-to-date on the latest developments in ABS labour market statistics. It also provides an opportunity for you to give us feedback on these developments so that we can better meet your statistical needs.

Labour Statistics News is produced twice a year by the Labour Market National Statistical Centre, a section of the ABS with responsibility for promoting the effective use of labour market statistics, influencing the development of national and international frameworks, and improving the relevance and reliability of labour market statistics.

2009 will be a busy year for us. One highlight for the coming year is the anticipated release of the first Employee Earnings and Hours confidentialised unit record file (CURF). We are currently producing a CURF using 2006 data, and we hope to release a 2008 CURF in the future.

Another innovative project seeks to maximise the longitudinal nature of the Labour Force Survey by investigating the possibility of matching data across survey months. If found to be feasible, this project will provide data on short-term labour market transitions, and the possibility of matching data across the various supplementary topics conducted in different months.

If you are looking to improve your understanding of ABS labour statistics, a wealth of information can be found on the Labour Theme Pages of the ABS website, and in the compendium publication, **Australian Labour Market Statistics** (cat. no. 6105.0). In addition, we run a one day course, *Introduction to Labour Statistics*, in partnership with the National Statistical Training Institute, which informs participants of the ABS labour collections and their applications.

If you have any questions about any of the work we do, please contact us on (02) 6252 7206 or email labour.statistics@abs.gov.au

*Carmel O'Regan, A/g Director
Labour Market National Statistical Centre
Australian Bureau of Statistics*

Current projects

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CURRENT PROJECTS

This section contains the following subsection :

- Review of the Labour Force Survey design
- Investigations into making greater use of labour survey data
- Employee Earnings and Hours - dissemination intentions
- Independent contractors

Review of the Labour Force Survey design

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Review of the Labour Force Survey design

The ABS is currently conducting a review of the Labour Force Survey, including survey outputs, the survey rotation pattern, and survey design. This review has been prompted by the quality limitations of some of the more detailed data from the survey.

This review will explore the possibilities of releasing Labour Force Survey key aggregate data monthly, and the remaining data quarterly. This would allow the ABS to reduce the number of products that are currently being released, while still producing high quality estimates for key series.

Before undertaking any changes the ABS will be producing a discussion paper in the next few months, which will consider different output strategies. The aim of the paper is to generate discussion among clients as part of the consultation process.

If you are interested in the changes being proposed and would like a copy of the discussion paper, please contact us on (02) 6252 7206 or email labour.statistics@abs.gov.au

Investigations into making greater use of labour survey data

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Investigations into making greater use of labour survey data

The Monthly Population Survey provides the ABS with a range of labour and other data on a monthly basis. The Monthly Population Survey comprises the Labour Force Survey and one or more supplementary surveys.

Households in the Monthly Population Survey are interviewed over eight consecutive months, and people who respond in consecutive months form a matched sample. It is from this matched sample that the ABS can produce Labour Force Survey gross flows, which show month-to-month labour market transitions. These transitions are released on a monthly basis as the Gross Flows datacube (GM1, from cat. no. 6291.0.55.001).

In 2009, the ABS plans to investigate how greater use could be made of existing Monthly Population Survey data by expanding on the approach used to produce gross flows data. The investigation will explore the feasibility of developing additional longitudinal data to facilitate analysis of short to medium labour market transitions, and also explore the extent to which richer cross-sectional datasets could be created by combining data collected in different months.

Any potential outputs from this project will be subject to the existing ABS confidentiality requirements, as set out in the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*.

For more information please contact us on (02) 6252 7206 or email labour.statistics@abs.gov.au

Employee Earnings and Hours - dissemination intentions

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Employee Earnings and Hours - dissemination intentions

The Employee Earnings and Hours Survey provides data on the composition and distribution of employee earnings, hours they are paid for, and the methods used to set their pay.

The ABS is currently working on the development of the first confidentialised unit record file (CURF) for Employee Earnings and Hours using data from the 2006 survey. This will be an expanded CURF accessible via the remote access data laboratory. It is expected the CURF will be available from late March 2009.

The CURF will include a derived data item titled 'jurisdictional coverage of employee'. This data item was used to create the indicative estimates as presented in the January 2008 **Australian Labour Market Statistics** article, [Jurisdictional Coverage of Pay-Setting Arrangements](#).

This article used information on business structures, along with the prevailing pay-setting instrument of the employee, to provide an indication of proportions of employees in the federal and state workplace relations jurisdictions according to the post-March 2006 workplace relations system.

Capitalising on the ground work undertaken for the 2006 survey CURF development, it is likely that a CURF will be produced from the 2008 survey. For more information on CURFs please refer to the [CURF Microdata Entry Page](#).

Results from the 2008 Employee Earnings and Hours Survey will be released in two stages. A preliminary release on 4 April 2009 will include key data items at broad levels only. Final data (including electronic spreadsheets) will follow in June. The initial release responds to a strong user need for data access to inform submissions to wage negotiation processes.

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Independent contractors

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Independent contractors

Changes in employment conditions and working arrangements in recent years have led to an increase in demand for data to support an understanding of these changes. To address this need, the ABS developed a survey topic on Contract Work and Labour Hire which was run in conjunction with the Forms of Employment Survey in November 2008.

An important aim of the survey topic is to measure the number and characteristics of independent contractors in Australia. Stakeholder consultation assisted in determining a framework to identify independent contractors as precisely as possible.

The identification of independent contractors necessitated some revisions to the conceptual basis of the Forms of Employment Survey. The independent contractors module will now be run annually with the Forms of Employment Survey, while the Labour Hire module will continue to be run three-yearly. Data from the 2008 survey will be released on 27 May 2009.

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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- Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation - Release of results

- Quarterly labour force underutilisation rate

- Improved family estimates from the Labour Force Survey

- Average Weekly Earnings Survey revisions

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Meetings, conferences and presentations

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Meetings, conferences and presentations

In mid 2008 the ABS undertook an environmental scan and situation analysis, which

was then discussed with the ABS' Labour Statistics Advisory Group. The process revealed several priority labour market issues for Australia, including participation, the ageing of the labour force, unemployment and underutilisation, skills shortages, the changing workplace relations environment, balancing work and family, and remuneration.

The overwhelming response from the Labour Statistics Advisory Group was that the ABS' first priority in meeting the challenges of measuring these issues is to ensure data quality. This confirms the need for ABS to continue to pursue methodological improvements, while continuing to use innovative techniques to aid the understanding of complex issues.

These priorities were reinforced at the NatStats 08 Conference and the Australian Labour Market Research Workshop, which were both held in late 2008. Speakers and researchers highlighted several imperatives for statistical agencies:

- informing fast-paced policy decisions by anticipating data needs;
- tapping into the potential of administrative data;
- creating longitudinal datasets that enable understanding of policy outcomes;
- ensuring high quality national, state and regional estimates;
- enabling international comparisons;
- communicating issues rather than numbers; and
- using data visualisation tools to improve the way statistics are communicated.

Other recent highlights include:

December 2008 - ABS attended the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians to discuss and adopt international statistical standards on two topics, Child Labour and Working Time; and to discuss and provide guidelines for future work on the measurement of decent work, indicators of labour underutilisation, and statistics on volunteer work. This follows on from ABS' participation in the Meeting of Experts on Statistics in April 2008.

December 2008 - ABS presented a paper on labour force underutilisation at the Centre of Full Employment and Equity conference. The paper introduced the new quarterly labour force underutilisation rate, which replaces the previous annual rate.

October 2008 - ABS submission to the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations' Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce. The submission advised the Standing Committee of relevant measures to inform their Inquiry.

July 2008 - ABS published an article on maternity leave entitlements in Australia. The article was produced to meet the statistical needs of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into paid maternity, paternity and parental leave and published in the July 2008 edition of Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105).

Five-yearly revision of Labour Force Survey Estimates

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Five-yearly revision of Labour Force Survey estimates

Every 5 years, the ABS revises Labour Force Survey estimates to reflect more up-to-date estimates of the population based on the most recent Census of Population and Housing. From February 2009, the Labour Force Survey estimates will be compiled using population benchmarks based on the 2006 Census.

Labour Force Survey estimates will be revised using 2006 benchmarks, from June 2001 onwards for person level estimates and from August 2004 onwards for family estimates. At the same time, Labour Force Survey Statistical Region boundaries will be revised so they align with the **2006 Australian Standard Geographical Classification** (cat. no. 1216.0). Regional estimates from November 2007 will be on the 2006 Australian Standard Geographical Classification basis.

Also, from the release of February 2009 Labour Force Survey estimates, industry and occupation employment estimates will be based on new classification structures. From February 2009, the Labour Force Survey estimates will no longer use the old classifications and will release historical industry and occupation estimates revised to the new classifications. Industry estimates from 1984 will be available based on the **Australia and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification, 2006, Revision 1.0** (cat no. 1292.0). Occupation estimates from 1996 will be available based on the **Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, First Edition, 2006** (cat no. 1220.0).

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Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation - Release of results

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Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation - release of results

The results of the 2007 Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation have been released, with information about the diversity of working arrangements in Australia, the way that people balance work and caring responsibilities, retirement plans and expectations, and superannuation coverage

across Australia.

The summary publication, **Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation, Australia** (cat. no. 6361.0), was released on 7 November 2008 and a suite of related products has now been released:

- An expanded Confidentialised Unit Record File (cat. no. 6361.0.55.001);
- A user guide to the survey (cat. no. 6361.0.55.002);
- A set of state tables (cat. no. 6361.0.55.003); and
- A set of datacubes (cat. no. 6361.0.55.004).

Analysis of the Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation Confidentialised Unit Record File will feature in a special issue of *The Australian Journal of Labour Economics*. The Journal has called for papers for the issue, which will be published early next year. For more information please refer to the **Labour Noticeboard** on the Labour Theme page of the ABS website.

An article on retirement intentions has already been included in the January 2009 issue of **Australian Labour Market Statistics** (cat. no. 6105.0), utilising the results of the survey. Two further articles are intended for the April 2009 edition, one on working arrangements used to care for children and the other on job flexibility.

The Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation brings together wide range of topics relating to work and the labour market. These include:

- demographics and housing;
- education;
- employment;
- income, including sources of income;
- working patterns and preferred working arrangements;
- job stability and flexibility;
- contract work;
- home-based work;
- time stress;
- retirement and retirement intentions;
- previous employment;
- superannuation;
- caring responsibilities; and
- working arrangements used for caring responsibilities.

Another advantage of this survey is that all respondents were interviewed individually rather than using the 'any responsible adult' approach used in the Labour Force Survey and its supplementary surveys.

The Survey of Employment Arrangements, Retirement and Superannuation follows on from the Survey of Employment Arrangements and Superannuation conducted in 2000. An appendix comparing the results of the 2007 survey with the 2000 survey is included in the summary publication (cat. no. 6361.0).

For more information please contact us on (02) 6252 7206 or email labour.statistics@abs.gov.au

Quarterly labour force underutilisation rate

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Quarterly labour force underutilisation rate

The Australian labour market has experienced significant changes in the past few decades. Among these is the increase in the proportion of employed people working part-time (from 15% in 1978 to 28% in 2008). As part-time employment has become more prevalent, so too has underemployment since underemployment is largely associated with part-time work.

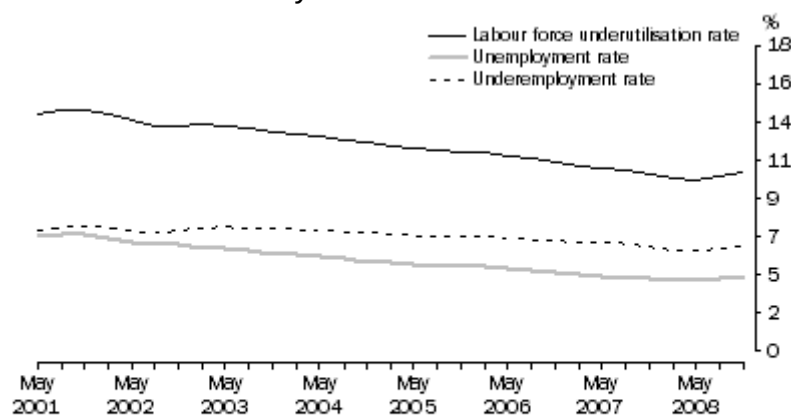
With the decline in the unemployment rate, underemployment has become an increasingly important social and economic issue, and as such the labour force underutilisation rate (unemployed plus underemployed as a proportion of the labour force) is becoming an important indicator of labour supply.

The quarterly labour force underutilisation rate was released by the ABS in July 2008. The quarterly rate replaces the annual labour force underutilisation rate. The quarterly time series is based on improved methodology, and provides more frequent and timely measures of changes in underemployment and, in turn, underutilisation than the previous annual measure.

Components of the quarterly labour force underutilisation rate

Graph 1 shows the relative contributions of unemployment and underemployment to the labour force underutilisation rate.

Graph 1: Quarterly measures of labour force underutilisation, Persons: Trend - May 2001 - Nov 2008



(a) The quarterly trend unemployment rate may differ slightly from the official monthly trend rates published in Labour Force, Australia (cat. no. 6202.0). The quarterly unemployment rates should only be used when comparing the quarterly underemployment rates and the quarterly labour force underutilisation rates.

In May 2001, the trend quarterly unemployment rate and trend quarterly underemployment rate contributed almost equally to the labour force underutilisation rate (6.8% and 7.1% respectively). That is, there were roughly equal numbers of unemployed and underemployed.

Since that time, however, the trend quarterly unemployment rate has fallen by approximately 2.5 percentage points (to 4.4% in November 2008, after a low of 4.2 in May 2008). The trend quarterly underemployment rate also fell over the period, although the decline was much less pronounced (0.9 percentage points to 6.2% in November 2008, after a low of 5.9% in May 2008).

This highlights that underemployment has assumed greater importance to labour force underutilisation over this time. Given that these trends have occurred mostly during a period of sustained economic growth, this may reflect the fact that unemployment is more sensitive to fluctuations in this stage of the economic cycle than underemployment.

A recent spotlight on underutilisation which discusses the latest movements in these measures was included in the January 2009 issue of **Australian Labour Market Statistics** (cat. no. 6105.0).

The underutilisation rate and its components tell different stories for men and women, for various age groups and for location (states and territories). Further analysis of underutilisation using the new quarterly rate can be found in the feature article, Quarterly labour force underutilisation rate in the July 2008 issue of **Australian Labour Market Statistics** (cat. no. 6105.0).

The quarterly measures of labour underutilisation are released in **Australian Labour Market Statistics** (ABS cat. no. 6105.0), tables 4.1 to 4.4 (from the October 2008 issue onwards).

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Improved family estimates from the Labour Force Survey

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Improved family estimates from the Labour Force Survey

Family estimates from the Labour Force Survey can be used to examine labour market activity within family units, such as the concentration of employment and unemployment in two-parent, single parent, and childless families.

These estimates have recently been improved with the introduction of a new methodology and expanded use of data collected in the Labour Force Survey. For more information on these improvements see **Information Paper: Improvements to Family Estimates from the Labour Force Survey** (cat. no. 6224.0.55.002).

Family estimates from the Labour Force Survey are released in **Labour Force, Australia: Labour Force Status and other Characteristics of Families** (cat. no. 6224.0.55.001).

The January 2009 edition of **Australian Labour Market Statistics** (cat. no. 6105.0) features an article on jobless families, using the revised estimates.

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Average Weekly Earnings Survey revisions

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Average Weekly Earnings Survey revisions

Estimates from the quarterly survey of Average Weekly Earnings were recently revised. These revisions relate to correcting for the misreporting of amounts salary sacrificed in the survey. Revised Average Weekly Earnings data series for August 1996 through to May 2008 were released on 13 November 2008, in **Average Weekly Earnings** (cat. no. 6302.0).

The definition of earnings used in the survey is, broadly, current and regular payments in cash. This means that the series have historically excluded amounts salary sacrificed, as these were considered to be payments in kind.

Under the revised conceptual framework for measures of employee remuneration, as presented in **Information Paper: Changes to ABS Measures of Employee Remuneration** (cat. no. 6313.0), amounts salary sacrificed are now considered to be payments in cash. However, as outlined in the information paper, the Average Weekly Earnings series is continuing on the existing basis (ie excluding amounts salary sacrificed), to maintain long-term comparability of the time series.

From August 2007, the Average Weekly Earnings survey was expanded to separately collect amounts salary sacrificed by employees, with the intention of releasing an additional series of earnings inclusive of salary sacrificed amounts.

Although the estimates of earnings from the Average Weekly Earnings survey should exclude amounts salary sacrificed, the survey expansion revealed evidence that earnings series from the Average Weekly Earnings survey have inadvertently included some amounts salary sacrificed.

Working closely with data providers, the ABS has been able to identify instances of misreporting (and amend reporting practices where necessary), quantify the extent of

misreporting that has occurred in recent times, and estimate the impact of this misreporting on the historical series.

The overall impact of the revisions is relatively small at the Australia level. There are, however, more significant impacts on some lower level (sector, state and industry) data series. It should be noted that the magnitude of the revisions is generally less than the standard errors associated with the estimates, and that the impacts of the revisions on estimates of quarterly movements are generally minor.

A broad indication of the data impacts, including the key series affected by the revisions, is presented in **Information Paper: Revisions to Average Weekly Earnings Series** (cat. no. 6302.0.55.001).

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Articles and analysis

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ARTICLES AND ANALYSIS

Comparing unemployment and the claimant count

A comparison of key differences between the number of unemployed persons based on Labour Force Survey estimates, and the number of labour market welfare recipients based on administrative data. The article also discusses overlaps between the two measures.

This article was first published in the January 2009 issue of Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105.0)

Jobless families

An analysis of families with children under 15 years and no parent employed. The article investigates characteristics of jobless households using revised family estimates from the Labour Force Survey.

This article was first published in the January 2009 issue of Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105.0)

Retirement intentions

An examination of the factors that influence the retirement intentions of employed Australians aged 45 years and over; and the main sources of income that people expect to retire on.

This article was first published in the January 2009 issue of Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105.0)

Spotlight on underutilisation

A brief look at underutilisation, showing a turning point in the quarterly series in November 2008.

This article was first published in the January 2009 issue of Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105.0)

Maternity leave

The Productivity Commission's inquiry into paid maternity, paternity and parental leave in Australia prompted analysis of the entitlements currently provided by employers to their employees. This analysis spans the five years from 2002 to 2007, examining maternity leave entitlements in relevant contexts such as weekly earnings and employment sector.

This article was first published in the July 2008 issue of Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105.0)

Time series analysis frequently asked questions

Seasonal patterns, irregular events and residual noise can all make it difficult to understand data. Seasonal adjustment is a process for removing these influences. Seasonally adjusted and trend estimates allow the underlying characteristics of data to be highlighted.

Seasonally adjusted and trend estimates are produced for Average Weekly Earnings time series, key Labour Force Survey series, and the Labour and Wage Price Indexes.

For help on which series to use for your purposes, refer to the **Time series analysis frequently asked questions** (cat. no. 1346.0.55.002).

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About the Labour Market National Statistical Centre

About the Labour Market National Statistical Centre

The Labour Market National Statistical Centre is responsible for:

- promoting the effective use of labour market statistics;
- influencing the development of national and international frameworks; and
- improving the relevance and reliability of labour market statistics.

We are organised into five teams:

- Labour Force Survey Projects
 - Undertakes research and development work relating to the design, operations, and analytical aspects of the Labour Force Survey.
- Labour Market Development Projects
 - Undertakes innovative research and development projects across all areas of labour market statistics.
- Participation and Skills
 - Provides expertise in statistics and statistical measures relating to labour market participation and skills
- Working Arrangements
 - Provides expertise in statistics and statistical measures relating to the working arrangements of employed persons
- Wages and Workplace Relations
 - Provides expertise in statistics and statistical measures relating to employee earnings and workplace relations

Contact us on (02) 6252 7206 or email labour.statistics@abs.gov.au

For help finding and accessing ABS products and services contact the National Information Referral Service on 1300 135 070

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Introduction to Labour Statistics training course

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Introduction to Labour Statistics training course

Introduction to Labour Statistics is a one-day training course run in partnership between the National Statistical Training Institute and the Labour Market National Statistical Centre.

The training course suits people with or without a related academic background, providing an overview of the range of concepts and issues associated with ABS labour statistics. It also explores the data produced by both household and employer based collections, and highlights the range of data available.

Introduction to Labour Statistics training courses are planned to be held in most state capitals during 2009.

For more details about this and other statistical training, or to register interest in a course, please refer to the ABS Training pages of the ABS website.



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For more information

Australian Labour Market Statistics (cat. no. 6105.0)

Australian Labour Market Statistics draws together data from a range of sources to provide an overall picture of the labour market and also includes a range of feature articles to assist users in understanding and interpreting data.

Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods (cat. no. 6102.0.55.001)

Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods is a comprehensive description of the concepts underpinning ABS labour statistics; and the data sources and methods used in the collection and compilation of these statistics. It explains what the statistics measure, how the various measures relate to each other, and how they are produced. It also discusses factors influencing their accuracy and reliability.

All key labour statistical releases

Labour statistical releases and publications can be found at the [Labour Releases](#) section of the Labour Theme Pages on the ABS website.

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